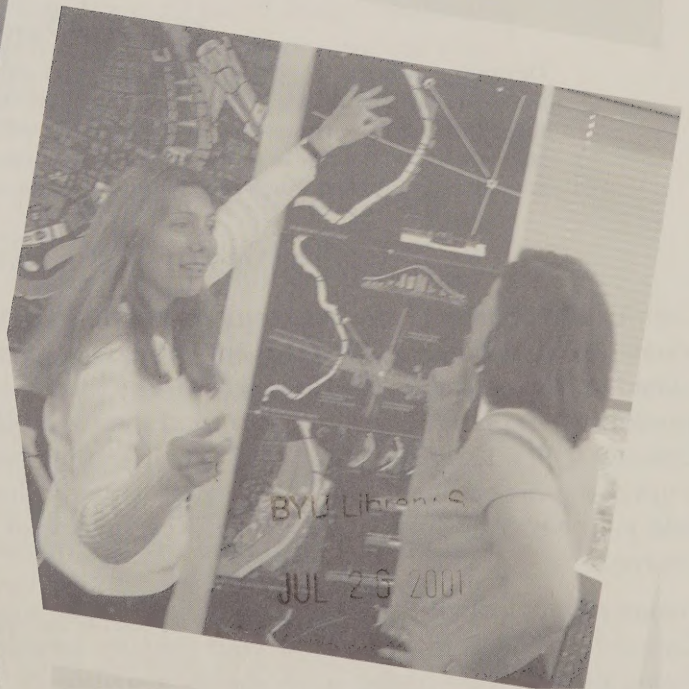
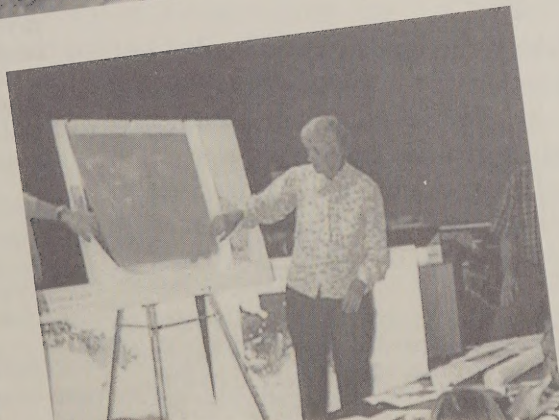
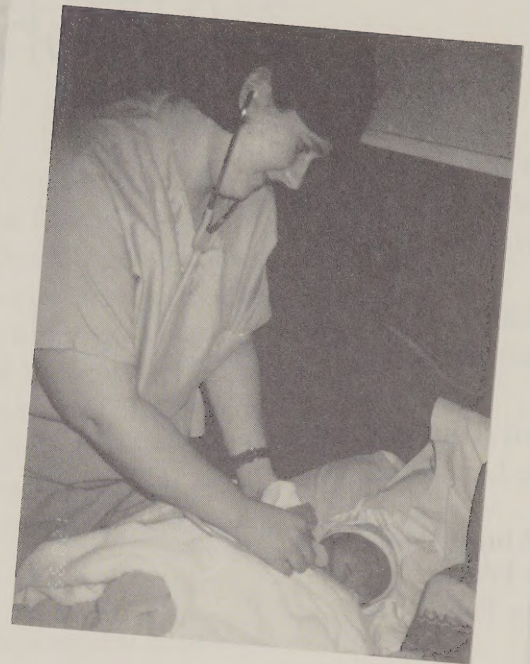
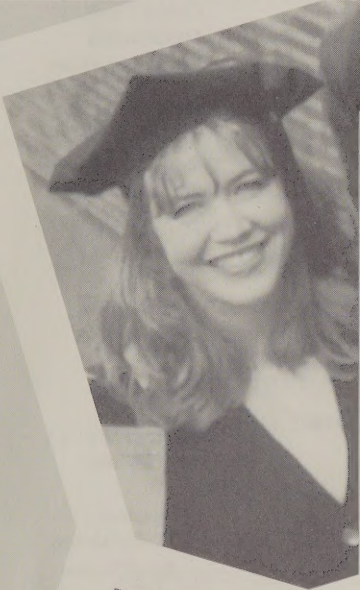


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Exponent II

Vol. 24, No. 3

Spring 2001



Women and Work

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Cover design by Mikelle Fisher Eastley. Clockwise from top left: Rachelle Brady, Wellesley Class of 1996; Linda Eastley, urban designer; Anne Lara Dredge, midwife intern; Stacey Ebbs and Erika Oliver Jerran, architects; Sue Hawes, marsh ecologist; and Terri Fischer, teacher

Call for Papers

Upcoming issues of *Exponent II* will deal with women and the international church, blended families, and step-parenting. If you are interested in writing about any of these topics, please contact us. In addition, we will be producing a Christmas-related issue this year. We'd love to see any essays, stories, poems, or thought pieces you have that tie into this much loved holiday. Please send them to us by October 1.

Submissions to *Exponent II*

Contribute to *Exponent II*. We welcome personal essays, articles, fiction, poetry, and book reviews for consideration. We focus on—but do not print exclusively—manuscripts that are related to women and to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Please e-mail submissions to ExponentII@aol.com, or mail them on IBM-compatible or Mac disks to *Exponent II*, Box 128, Arlington, MA 02476. If sending hard copy, double-space your manuscript and write on one side only with your name, address, phone number, and, when available, your e-mail address on each page. Keep a copy of your work; manuscripts will not be returned.

We are always looking for artwork and photography to use for covers and illustrations in *Exponent II*. Send slides or copies of your work for consideration. If you are interested in illustrating articles, please contact us for specific assignments.

The purpose of *Exponent II* is to provide a forum for Mormon women to share their life experiences in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This exchange allows us to better understand each other and shape the direction of our lives. Our common bond is our connection to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and our commitment to women. We publish this paper as a living history in celebration of the strength and diversity of women.

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Choices and Pursuits

When I was twelve, my family suffered from very hard economic times. My mom, feeling the need to contribute to the family finances, went to school full time to get a bachelor's degree. Within a few years, she decided that she wanted to continue and get a graduate degree in elementary education administration. Working full time while going to school full time, she helped support our large family while getting straight As in school. She slept little, studied hard, and met her goals a few years later.

During those years, my mom went through a dramatic transformation. She went from feeling dependent and troubled to feeling independent and self-assured. Seeing her now makes me wonder how she ever *didn't* work. She loves it! It was, in part, her example that influenced me to pursue a professional career. I have been working as a business researcher and management consultant for five years now. In these short five years, I have found an incredible sense of strength and achievement.

Last spring, a group of women from the Chicago area submitted a set of essays and stories about work/family issues, which appeared in the Spring 2000 issue (Vol. 23, No. 3) of *Exponent II*. It highlighted the issues that families deal with when deciding how the economic, developmental, and logistical needs of the family will be met as one or both parents work. As I read that issue, I was inspired by the depth of heart that went into those decisions.

Soon after that issue was published, the

editorial board met to discuss what subjects we wanted to address in future issues of the paper. Having gotten a taste of some of the professional careers that the Chicago women were pursuing, I wanted to read more. I wanted to know what kinds of interests and accomplishments women like me were pursuing. I suggested that we put together an issue of the paper that celebrated the professional accomplishments of women.

This issue of *Exponent II* contains essays about the choices and accomplishments of six women. In these essays, you will find discussions about why the authors decided on a particular interest, the steps they took to get where they are, and the difficulties that they have faced in the workplace. The women who have contributed to this issue of *Exponent* have all faced major challenges in the pursuit of their careers but, as you will read, they also report reaping many rewards.

We salute the courage, discipline, and strength that these women possess. We thank them for their willingness to share their stories, and we hope you read their words with as much admiration as we have. As we women continue to realize the benefits of living in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we will be confronted with exponentially more choices and challenges. We hope that this issue of *Exponent* will inspire you to pursue your interests as a hobby, a short-term professional interest, or a life-long career.

Mikelle Fisher Eastley

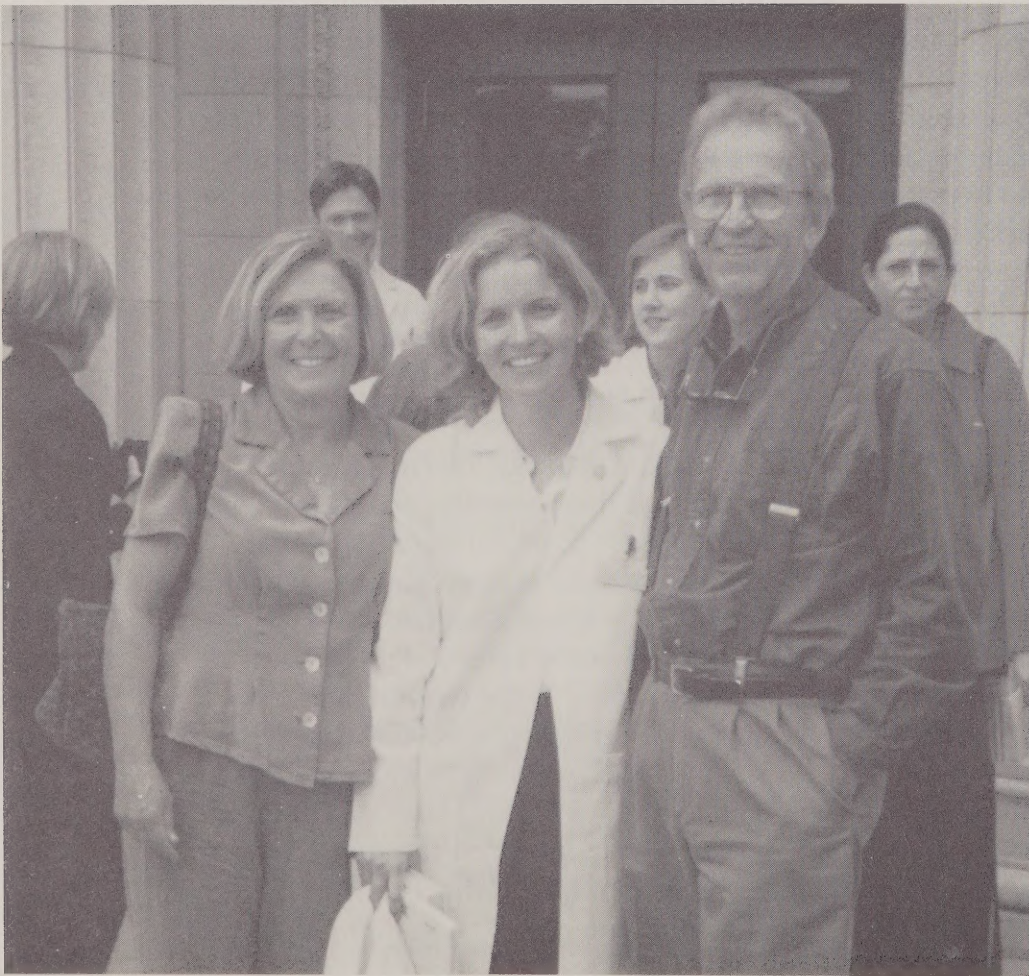
On Life's Work

by Marion Bishop

I am a first-year medical school student at the University of Utah. At thirty-five years old, I am also the oldest student in the class. I spend my days with

students who are ten and fifteen years younger than I am, and together we listen to biochemistry lectures and dissect bodies in the anatomy cadaver lab. All of this is very fresh and wonderful and marks a new moment—a change of career—in my life.

But the experience of medical school is also bewildering—and not just because I am older than all of my classmates. Rather, it is bewildering because of where I have come from: Three years ago, I was an assistant English professor at a small private college in Massachusetts. I lectured, attended faculty meetings, and advised students. My days were filled with literature and conversation and great writers. Today, I memorize the shapes and names of molecules, identify body parts, and try to learn about a host of human illnesses and the ways modern medicine has for making people well. These two life experiences could not be more different.



Marion with her parents

When people ask me how I came to change careers and go to medical school, I do not always know what to tell them. Two narratives compete in my head as explanations for why I made this decision. One is an account of mourning and loss; the other tells of finally answering an unrealized childhood dream. The trouble is, I am not quite sure which story is true—or even which one holds the most truth.

The first story begins in 1986, when I married my first grown-up boyfriend—a simple way to say he was the first adult man I had ever dated. We were both students at Utah State University, and when I fell deeply in love with him, it made perfect sense that we would get married. I was only twenty years old.

In 1987, we graduated from college and moved to New York City. My husband worked on Wall Street, and I began attending graduate school at New York University. I had always loved language and literature and imagined using a master's degree to teach English at a junior college while raising a family. I never planned to get a Ph.D., but the first few years of my marriage were good, New York City was wildly exciting, and NYU kept giving me money to go to school. Before long, I had completed a master's degree and all my course work for a Ph.D. It was a vibrant, lush time.

But after several years in New York, my husband and I moved, and then moved again, eventually settling in Boston. The marriage changed, too. What had started as

a companionship and the hope of a lifelong friendship between equals had grown into something that was hurtful and debilitating to me.

In 1996, just after we had been married for ten years, I left. It is hard to explain what happened in the year or eighteen months after my divorce or what happens to most people in the wake of so much loss—and the loss of so much hope. I had thought that, at thirty, I would be busy raising a family, not starting over. Instead, I was heartbroken and spent. For a good, long while, I could not get over the fact that there was now someone in the world called my “ex-husband.”

At the same time, I was also trying to finish my doctoral dissertation, a daunting—and sometimes miserable—task, even under the best of circumstances. The best I can say is that I took to my dissertation each day not as a professional, working to reach a goal or even complete a project, but as a broken human being, seeking a way to comfort myself by spending a few hours each day in the company of my own words and the ideas in my head.

But something else was also happening. As a newly single person, I slowly began re-examining all aspects of my life, turning over everything—from the intricacies of all my relationships to what kind of foods I liked to eat now that I

was no longer sharing meals with anyone else. I also had to consider purely practical matters, including where I wanted to live, what kind of work I wanted to do, and how much money I wanted to make.

These last questions about livelihood were especially pressing because at that time the job market for academics was terrible. My job was a temporary position, and although I was finishing a Ph.D., there was no guarantee I could get a permanent, tenure-track job. Even if I was fortunate enough to find work, I would probably not have the luxury of choosing where I lived. This would not have mattered if I had children and a spouse to take with me to a

When people ask me how I came to change careers and go to medical school, I do not always know what to tell them.

teaching position at a small college in Moline, Texas, or Lawrence, Kansas. But in the process of examining my life, I had also concluded that if I was going to spend much more time single, I wanted to be closer to my parents and siblings. This meant finding a way to return to the West.

So ironically, even as I was finishing my dissertation, I knew I would probably have to give up my academic career. Perhaps more importantly, I also knew that whatever work I ended up doing had to be meaningful. Because I did not have a partner or children to direct my love and passion toward, I knew I needed to find

work I could love and that left me feeling that my life had a purpose, no matter how solitary it was.

I started looking at different professional possibilities: I thought about teaching at private high schools and for a time considered getting a master's degree in social

In this way of telling my story, my decision to go to med school was a practical decision—the best answer to how to take care of my needs.

work. Both were career possibilities that sounded fulfilling and would let me live close to my family. But neither possibility felt quite right. Then, slowly, brewing under the surface, came an idea to go to medical school.

My father is a physician, and I had always been curious about medicine, so in some ways this idea made sense. But it also made me angry, and I ignored it for a long time because of what it meant. It was such a big time commitment and much more work than I felt willing to give: By the time I completed pre-med, then med school and a residency, I would log another nine years in school. This seemed like a miserable way to spend my thirties. I also had concerns about devoting my remaining childbearing years to such an arduous course of study. This question, more than any other, gave me pause. Finally, I also worried about how to finance the whole venture and if I would be smart enough to succeed in the science courses after spending so

many years doing very different kinds of work.

In the end, the medical school argument won. No matter how many times I tried to talk myself into something simpler, I kept coming back to the idea of medical school and only felt peaceful when

I imagined trying to be in medical school. So I sorted out how to get the money, paid a therapist good dollars to help convince me I could manage the science courses, and gave myself permission to answer questions about childbearing if and when a man—and a permanent relationship—entered my life again. In short, I decided that I couldn't control whether I ever became a mother or a spouse again, but I could create meaningful work for myself in the meantime.

In this way of telling my story, my decision to go to med school was a supremely practical decision—the best answer to how to take care of my needs and my future—after the loss of a ten-year marriage. As a practical, how-can-I-best-care-for-myself decision, it is one I am supremely proud of.

Without a doubt, going to medical school was a way to manage my transition from loss to an adult life that would belong just to me.

But this isn't the whole story.

There is another, quite different one, as well. Because, you see, the medical school dream had always been there, lurking under the surface somewhere—even in my marriage, I think—waiting for the right time to be born. Although it took me a long time to admit it—and to understand it—there was never anything I wanted to do more than the work I grew up watching my father do. The dignity of care he gave the people in our small hometown and the expertise that guided him in people's lives was something I had always wanted to have. In fact, there was probably never a moment in my life I have not wanted to be a doctor.

But as a girl growing up in a rural community in northern Utah, I had never seen a female physician. It is almost embarrassing to admit that I met my first one on a visit to the student health clinic when I was a graduate student at NYU. Coming of age as I did, there was really no way that I could imagine making

In this way of telling my story, deciding to go to med school was not a practical decision at all. It was a deeply spiritual and psychological one.

medicine my life's work. So I picked my second favorite choice. Teaching and a career in English were satisfying pursuits and activities that my community found more socially acceptable for girls.

In this way of telling my story, deciding to go to medical school

was not a practical decision at all. Rather, it was a deeply spiritual and psychological one. Specifically, it was about returning to an unrealized dream and giving myself something in my adult life that I had not been able to deliver as a child or young woman. Although I had loved teaching English, deciding to become a doctor represented coming to some deeper truth about myself that it took me until I was thirty to ferret out. The decision to go to medical school was a way of finally honoring that truth and setting my life's course on the right path.

As a story of slowly coming to know myself, of learning to trust my instincts—no matter how crazy or inconvenient they seemed—and of making sense of life's journey, I am equally proud of this narrative. That I could get to a point where I could not only hear but act upon my psyche's deepest wish fills me with no small amount of gratitude and wonder. For whatever psychological and spiritual processes brought me to this place, I am exceedingly grateful.

But all this brings me to my final point, which is that recently I have begun to wonder if these two stories are actually the same story—if perhaps the post-divorce necessity of meeting my practical, day-to-day needs was actually also a way of satisfying my soul. Put another way, I am beginning to speculate that attending to my soul's deepest wish was also a way to meet my everyday needs of money, work, and meaning. And I mean this not just in theoretical, pie-in-the-sky terms, but also on a deeply pragmatic level—one that is

tied inextricably to my life's experience. You see, I wonder sometimes if med school was not so much an answer to the loss of my marriage as it was the reason I had to experience marriage—and then divorce. I feel the same way about getting a Ph.D.—that going to medical school was not just an alternative career choice when an academic path did not work out, but rather that graduate school in English was a necessary prerequisite for the kind of doctor I was intended to be.

Most of the time, this way of thinking hurts my head. But it also suggests to me that perhaps there was something only loving and loss and language could teach me before I could approach medical school and become the kind of doctor I want to be. Perhaps more important, when I can tolerate this way of thinking, it also explodes my paradigms. It gives me a context big enough to understand the sad and disparate things in my life and to believe that someday I might not see my life experiences as separate stories but as part of one giant—and necessary—whole.

But most days, right now, I just try to go to school. I memorize the names of enzymes or skeletal structures and learn the intricate cascade of processes that control bodily functions like blood clotting or sugar metabolism. And all the while, I hear the voices of my favorite poets and my most-loved students in my head. Back and forth, back and forth, all day long:

medicine and literature, science and humanities, teacher and student, longing and loss, grief and

Perhaps there was something only loving and loss and language could teach me before I could become the kind of doctor I want to be.

rebirth. And I hope that somewhere in my future there is a place where all these opposites meet: in a kind word to a suffering patient; in an articulate and fresh response to a difficult medical problem; or creeping around the corner of my own head—like two sides of an immense circle, closing in on each other, narrowing in on the same point, cycling back to the place where they both began. ■

Oberlin College, where Annie Dredge is in school, has the month of January off so that students can do a faculty-supervised project that they themselves devise. Wanting to learn about midwifery, Annie researched and discovered Casa de Nacimiento, a birthing clinic in El Paso, Texas, that would take her on as an intern for her "J-term" project. The following is an e-mail that Annie sent out to all her friends and relatives about her experience.



e-mail from el paso

by Anne Lara Dredge

Here I am at the *Casa de Nacimiento* (translated "House of Birth") in El Paso, Texas. This truly is the house of birth—we eat, sleep, and breathe birth. When I first arrived here at midnight, a woman was in labor, so I got to observe my first birth ever within two hours of my arrival. It was truly incredible! And it was two in the morning! It seems women don't give birth much in normal waking hours.

This birth center is freestanding and non-intervention based. It

works under the philosophy that the midwives only assist during birth. Laboring women do all the work, and they can certainly do it themselves. I have learned that lesson over and over. The center does not give regular medications; all deliveries are done by natural childbirth. Some homeopathic and herbal medicines are given to stimulate labor, but that is all.

The midwives here know so much about the body and the birth process. Each of them enriches my

life and knowledge each day. One midwife is a naturopathic doctor and acupuncturist; one is a nurse.

That first night was good preparation for what the whole month would be like. I have conducted one hundred prenatal exams—with supervision, of course. I have also been present at thirty-five births, sixteen of which I assisted and four of which I "caught"!

I do a whole slew of medical procedures I never saw myself

doing, but I actually enjoy it. After a patient has passed thirty-six weeks' gestation, I do vaginal exams during prenatal visits to assess dilation, station, and effacement of the cervix. I also draw blood (isn't that nuts!), do pap smears, breast exams, and finger pricks to assess hemoglobin. I'm pretty overwhelmed with the number of skills I have learned.

We had our official phlebotomy class the other day, and Roseanna, one of the senior midwives here, wanted to use me as a "poking doll" to let another intern try drawing blood. I didn't even care. We prick each other's fingers all the time to test hemoglobin. I think it's nuts that I, who used to pass out at the sight of blood, am drawing it! I recently had a woman get all dizzy on me when I drew her blood. It's funny to be on the other side of that.

The birthing center is a lot more clinical than I expected; there is a lot more protocol. But it's so fascinating! And, yes, overwhelming at times.

In prenatal exams, I take all vital signs, palpate the abdomen to assess fundal height and presentation of the fetus, and take fetal heart tones with a cool "doppler" machine, which uses ultrasonic waves to hear the heartbeat. It's always fun to have the baby kick your hands. I had one that kept kicking the doppler so much that the heartbeat kept skipping!

Postpartum exams are harder because you have to examine mom *and* baby. I assess the retraction of the uterus, take vitals signs, and

finger stick the mom. Then we weigh the babies (the best part!) as well as examine the babies and their umbilici.

Then we have to do the worst part of the job—the dreaded PKU. We have to poke the heel of the baby's foot and fill five quarter-sized circles on a card with the blood to test the baby for infections. It's horrible to poke that little baby and make him or her scream and bleed! It's the worst thing I have to do. I hate it! It takes a long time and it's hard to do and I feel so guilty. The mothers usually sit and hold the baby and try to calm it down. The fathers usually leave. They just can't take it.

So that is the basic stuff I do every day, and that's just the beginning! I generally work twelve-hour shifts, but sometimes I do twenty-four-hour shifts. That hurts. I wake up at 6 A. M. and don't get to sleep again until 6 A.M. the next morning. Sometimes the time goes fast, like when there are four women in labor at once!

My duties vary depending on which shift I am doing. "First on" is responsible for doing labor checks, keeping track of laboring moms, and catching babies. "Second on" is responsible for helping "first on" with all her duties, taking fetal heart tones during the pushing stage, labor coaching the mother, charting, and basically being the right-hand woman for the "first on." So, the days are busy with appointments and births. At night, we restock, clean, and do labor checks and births. We are always checking postpartum moms and babies for about six

hours after birth—sometimes longer, sometimes shorter. It's so great to see those little babies in their mother's arms.

I've seen so many amazing women and amazing vaginas. Birth is such an indescribable process. I am so lucky to be able to witness it every day here. It's all very normal to me, but it never gets dull.

The first birth I saw was so sweet. It took a good half hour to move the baby's head through the pelvis during pushing, but the mom worked hard. When that baby girl was born, the mother just exclaimed her love over and over again. It's so strange to see that child in the world that I had just been taking fetal heart tones for. Birth is so different than it is in all the movies. It's gloriously messy, a lot of hard work, and different every time.

The scariest birth I've seen here was a baby with shoulder dystocia—a situation in which the baby's shoulders get stuck in the pelvis after the head has already crowned. The mother was nineteen, and I had seen her for two appointments before she went into labor. She was such a sweetheart. She had a long labor during which I did some labor coaching with her. She was so brave.

When she was pushing, I just had this feeling that something was not right. The baby's head came out but wouldn't move out after that. She kept pushing—and nothing. What happened next all took place so fast. The midwives swiveled the mother so her bottom was hanging off the bed, and one applied

suprapubic pressure while the other literally pulled on the baby. While they were turning Maria, I was holding onto both of her hands, hovering upside-down over her. I told her to keep looking into my eyes and that everything was okay. I maintained eye contact with her through that whole process.

It was so scary. The baby's head turned white. Finally, he came out, white and floppy, and with him a huge wave of blood and amniotic fluid. We wrapped him in warm towels and took him to the lab and gave him oxygen and medicine, but he didn't improve very much. So we had him transported via ambulance to the hospital.

We were all exhausted. I was in shock. Maria bled a fair amount. We gave her pitocin to staunch the bleeding. Maria amazed me with her calm concentration.

I saw Maria and her baby for their five-day postpartum appointment, and they were both fine. But it was a heart-stopping experience. It certainly made me rethink a lot of things.

The other day we had a woman come in whose baby had stopped moving. She was terrified that she had lost her baby. I was so nervous and scared that it took me awhile to find the fetal heart tones. But when we did hear that beautiful heartbeat, she cried, I cried, we all cried. It was a moment of pure grace.

The culture here is incredibly different from what I am used to. The women we care for here are so

strong in spirit. Many, however, are malnourished and in poverty. Many are very young. The youngest mother I have seen here was fifteen. Many of them come over the border from Mexico to have their babies here so they can be American citizens when they turn eighteen. These women try their best to take care of themselves. To see them work through labor so stoically is an inspiration to me.

These women have many superstitions and customs about pregnancy and labor. For instance, they are taught to stay up all night and walk and not eat once they go into labor. But this is so bad for them.

They have a lot of modesty and sometimes shame about the female body. Some men will not come in to watch the birth of their children because they think it's women's business. But some men get really involved and want to help catch their babies and cut the cord. It's great! When the fathers cry, I always cry!

My Spanish is pathetic. I speak what we call "caveman Spanish." We just eliminate all the verbs and speak with nouns! I can only say a few things. Mostly just enough to run *citas* (appointments) and births: "push," "a little more or less," "I need to draw blood," "I need blood from your finger," "blood pressure," "I'm going to examine your stomach," "I'm going to listen to the baby's heart," and so forth. For the most part, I just point a lot and say "I'm sorry!" The language barrier makes it harder to connect with these women and give them the

kind of care that I would like to give them.

My first catch was so exciting! Karina came as a walk-in. This means she walked in while in labor and had never been here before. Her water hadn't broken yet, and she wasn't complaining of too much pain, so we assumed she wasn't in heavy labor. We began the initial interview, physical exam, and medical history. As we got the history of her previous pregnancies, she stated that she had had her last baby in two hours. So, we checked her cervix, and she was six cm. dilated. Then we (the senior midwife and I) realized we didn't have much time if she progressed so quickly.

We took her to the first birthing room. Ally, the senior midwife, put me in charge of taking vitals and fetal heart tones. I sat in the room with Karina and her husband and labor-coached in my pathetic Spanish and kept track of contractions. Then, about an hour after she came in, she was grunting with the contractions — what we call "sounding pushy." So, I called in Ally. We both checked her dilation and, sure enough, she was complete. Karina only pushed for about fifteen minutes.

There I was, sitting on the birth room bed, my gloves on, stretching her perineum to prevent tears and watching the baby's head come down the birth canal. She pushed the head completely out in one push. As soon as I began to put pressure on the baby's head to deliver the shoulders (with guidance from Ally), the baby's whole

body came swimming out in a complete explosion of amniotic fluid. I was covered!

The other midwives called it a true birth baptism!

But I didn't care. I was so focused on those moments of birth. It was breathtaking! Andrea, another senior midwife, said I looked like someone had just hit me over the head with a two-by-four!

I gripped the slippery baby and placed the new little girl on her mother's chest. Up until that moment, I was so focused, mind completely set on the task ahead, I didn't let my emotions get to me. But then it washed over me and I could hardly breathe or think.

A moment later, I snapped out of it. I felt her fundus and assessed for placental detachment. Her uterus was firm and round, and she pushed the placenta out with little help from me. She had a very beautiful, healthy placenta with only a small hole in the membranes since they didn't rupture until the birth.

I did the newborn exam, got to stamp the baby's feet, and spent hours checking up on Karina and her newborn, happily breastfeeding almost since birth.

Elizabeth Nayeli Vasquez was born at 4:56 P.M. on January 21, 2001, after an hour and a half of labor. Listed on the Casa de Nacimiento records is my name, Anne Lara Dredge, as the midwife. I still can't believe it. For hours

afterward, I would randomly say, "I caught a baby." (Literally!)

I thought I would be nervous and terrified at my first catch and have no idea what to do, but it wasn't that way at all. It felt so natural to me. I knew what to do (with plenty of guidance). It was like the



touch was already in my hands. I am thoroughly addicted!

I have seen many mind-boggling things. Placentas truly amaze me. They are incredible organs. We examine every placenta to make sure it is healthy and complete so the mother won't hemorrhage. You can tell so much about the health of the women by their placentas. I wish I could show all of you how incredible they are. And umbilical cords, too! I have seen a "true knot" in an umbilical cord, as well as umbilical hematoma.

We see many interesting and unusual situations here. One woman presented with a prolapsed hand and cord, which means the baby's hand and cord

had dropped out of the uterus. Lavern, a senior midwife, was doing a vaginal exam, and the baby grabbed her finger! Although it sounds funny, it is a very serious condition, and the woman was transported to the hospital with the midwife's hand in her vagina, holding the baby inside.

We can handle a lot of things here, but when risky things happen, we are blessed to have a good relationship with the nearby hospital.

I have learned so much about the human body, medicine, natural medicines, women, birth, and myself. I really love this work. This is my calling. It feels so right to me. I am so hungry for more knowledge about it. After graduating from Oberlin, I will definitely be going to midwifery school, maybe even nursing school. Yes, I really did have this medical slant in me after all. It's taken me this long to realize I can do it! I just had to find the method and type of body study and medicine that I love.

I don't want to go back to the real world. Nothing could match this experience. The Casa is so exquisite. I am so glad for all the things I have learned and will continue to learn. I want to immerse myself in this forever. I want everyone to know how incredible birth and the beginning of life is!

Love,
Annie

I never thought I'd grow up to be a union leader. Being a part of Big Labor--or a Labor Boss as we are commonly known--was never discussed as a career option in high school or college. I always knew, however, that I would work

they ended up in a mental hospital instead.

In advocating for their health, I assisted the Mental Health Legal Advisors in finding clients who were willing to become a part of a

In the end, we were successful in our class action lawsuit, which guaranteed health care for hundreds of mentally ill patients in public mental hospitals.

It's About Power for

with people in some way. Even my name indicated the direction I would take. My name Sandra is derived from Alexandra. It means "helper of mankind."

At first, I thought I would be a teacher because teachers were the only adults I really knew outside of my parents. However, in college I was afraid to take the public speaking course required of teachers. My fear of public speaking led me to decide to do social work instead. Little did I know that several years later I would find myself addressing a meeting of 2,500 social workers, urging them to strike.

This is my story of how a social worker became a labor leader.

Being an Advocate

I was a social worker in a public mental health center in Boston. Many of my patients were elderly and had medical problems in addition to their mental health problems. I found that some of them needed in-patient medical services but were denied this care because of their mental illness. So

class action lawsuit with the intent of requiring that the state provide medical care for those in need. In very short order, I was called into my supervisor's office, and she informed me that it was not my job to "sue the state" and told me to cease and desist from this work.

I was concerned because, as a social worker, I was now unable to care for the well-being of my clients. This lawsuit was one way to get them the care they needed. So I called my union.

The SEIU Local 509 represents more than 11,000 human service and education workers in Massachusetts. They told me that, with the support of the union, I could take this case because, as a union member in my worksite, I would have protection to stand up for my professional beliefs.

It was at this time that I learned that unions were more than service agencies for their members. Not only were they there for my personal benefit, but they were there for the benefit of all workers—and the elderly mentally ill, too.

Being a Leader

It was at this point that my career in the labor movement began to grow. I moved quickly up the union ladder. I started out as a union steward, which is the union representative of the workers in the workplace, and eventually was elected president of the SEIU Local 509. I found that my interest in advocating on behalf of my clients fit in nicely with the advocacy of the rights of workers.

Believing that if workers are valued and respected on the job, the quality of their work improves, I took my social work practice into the union of social workers. By doing so, I demonstrated my belief that the quality of care for the poor and disabled would be benefitted by the union's efforts.

At one point, we found that there were workers who dealt with the mentally ill and retarded in non-union and union programs who had gone almost seven years without a pay raise. They were earning less than \$7 an hour. This low wage resulted in high staff turnover. The mentally ill and retarded were losing staff that they

had learned to trust. The impact was severe.

Our efforts resulted in getting the state legislature to increase funding for these workers. We increased their wages to a

important. I was worried that I could not say what I wanted profoundly enough.

Then I watched the men in the group. They got up often and said stupid things or repeated what

someone before them had said. It was as if they just wanted to make sure that people saw them as leaders, no matter how they sounded. My sister union members, for the most part, were as quiet as I was.

continued on p. 14

People Who Work

by Sandy Felder

minimum of \$9 per hour.

Our work was not done here, but we made a difference and continued to advocate for these workers and try to improve the quality of care for hundreds of thousands of citizens who depend on state services. For example, we fought for and won an agreement with the Department of Social Services that sets a limit on the number of families a social worker can be responsible for. So, when an abused kid needs our help, our social workers would have the time to assist them.

We were able to achieve and win these things because we had power. My union had power, and so did I.

Some Thoughts on Power

Being president of a labor union and now the State Director for the National AFL-CIO, I learned that there is power in speaking out. In the beginning of my union involvement, I was afraid of speaking publicly. I thought that my fellow union members would not take what I had to say as



I began to see that the only way to convince others of the value of my issues was to speak out. So I decided to make my voice heard. Knees knocking, I would stand at the mike and speak. I tried not to worry so much about how I felt and instead put my mind to the task at hand.

This is the first step of taking power:

Take power in your hands and speak out for what you believe.

Once I challenged my fears, there was no stopping me. I even became known as “Sound-Bite Sandy.” I was a regular media source and public figure. I became a spokesperson for labor, speaking out against attacks on health care and cutbacks in social and human services.

My efforts led to the passage of laws that protect thousands of human service workers and the services they provide, as well as giving them wage gains and benefit increases. I also helped pass a law prohibiting the use of public dollars by employers to seek to deny a worker’s right to form a union and have a voice at work.

Women Taking Power in a Man’s World

As president of my union, I soon found myself in an odd position. I was in a world where most of my peers were men.

Soon after my election as president

of SEIU 509, I was elected to be a vice president of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO. It is the umbrella organization for all the local unions in the state, representing

Little did I know that several years later I would find myself addressing a meeting of 2,500 social workers, urging them to strike.

more than 400,000 working families.

I will always remember my first meeting. I went to the union hall and, as I entered, I saw that there was only one other woman union leader in a room of about forty men. Like radar, I found myself immediately zeroing in on her and found a friend to this day.

Together, we approached the leadership of the state federation and asked how we could work together to bring more women into union leadership positions. The president and treasurer agreed to work with us.

It has taken a lot of time, and we have had to continually deal with resistance from other male labor leaders threatened by their perceived loss of power or unwilling to share power. But we took this challenge seriously and created initiatives to bring women into the forefront of the Massachusetts labor movement.

We helped to create an institute for rank and file women to learn leadership skills. We became role models by placing ourselves in

public arenas, by mentoring upcoming leaders, and by demanding diversity at every head table and public forum.

Today there are thirteen women on the executive board, including one who is the second highest officer of the federation, and more on the runway to leadership.

I am proud to be working at a national level where, under the new leadership of AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, a major goal of the federation is to have its leadership reflect the faces of its members. Almost half of union members are women. We are the largest working women’s organization in the country. We still have a long way to go, but we now have national support. Women are on the road to union power at last!

Power for People Who Work

I believe unions are the only effective voice for working people and their families. I heard it said once that the most effective anti-poverty program is a union contract. I think this is true.

Diane, a member of my union, once told me how proud she was to finally be a member of SEIU 509. She was a single mother who started out on welfare. Thanks to the union’s help, she was able to go to college. Now she is off welfare and works at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. She credits her ability to get off welfare to the union.

In my view, unions are the counterbalancing force between the rich and poor, between corporate greed and the common good. Union power lies in the ability of millions of union members and their families to mobilize for social and economic justice.

Basic social and economic initiatives that are the direct result of organized labor's efforts include the minimum wage, workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, social security, the eight-hour work day, overtime pay, paid sick and vacation days, health insurance, family medical leave, pensions, and more. All of these benefits were won by unions taking on the cause.

I wish that more workers had the opportunity to become union members. I have heard, in fact, that if asked, most workers in this country say they would join a union today if they had a chance.

Workers want to have a voice on the job. They want to be able to have a say in their wages, benefits, and other working conditions.

Unfortunately, corporations will do just about anything to stop their employees from gaining a voice at work or power on the job. Workers today risk losing their jobs when they exercise leadership to form a union in the workplace. More than 10,000 workers a year are illegally fired for union activity. Sharing power is something many bosses do not want.

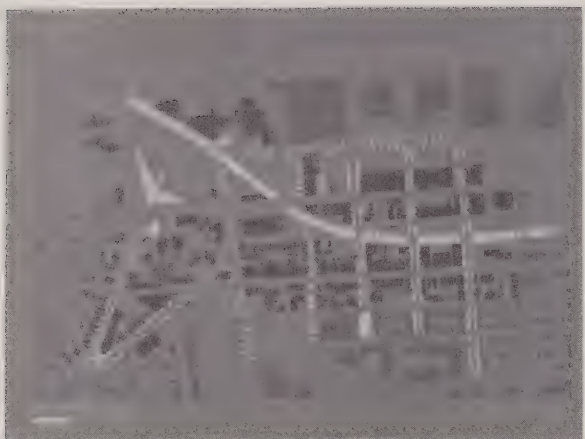
If I can take power, so can you!
If I can learn to speak out, so can most people. If I can take leadership on issues that I care about and be taken seriously, so can anyone who wants to.

If you want things to be better for others, you have to be willing to take power in your hands and lead. You have to join with those organizations that believe in what you do and get involved in them.

I heard it once said that the most effective anti-poverty program is a union contract. I have seen this to be true.

I do not believe that I alone have power. I believe the power I hold is based in the thousands of union members that I am privileged to represent. Together, we all have the power to bring about the kind of society that values working families and those in need of a helping hand no matter what their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, or immigration status. ☐

Sandy Felder is the Massachusetts State Director for the AFL-CIO, a voluntary federation of 68 national and international labor unions representing more than 13 million working women and men of every race and ethnicity and from every walk of life. In the AFL-CIO, workers and unions find the opportunity to combine strength and to work together to improve the lives of America's working families, bring fairness and dignity to the workplace, and secure social and economic equity in our nation.



Go—

*envision them
in your mind,
your daily adventures,
in your thoughts.*

*Smell them, feel them, touch them, enjoy
how your body
... moves
through,
down,
across,
up
over their spaces.*

*Caress their details and let them CHANGE
you.*

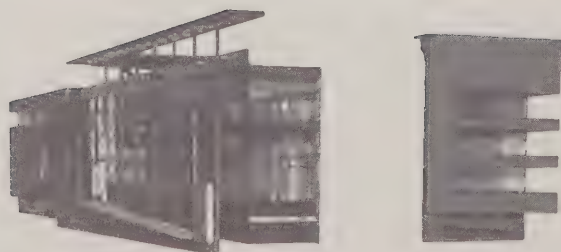


experience: architecture

Those sensual beings are liquid (light) and solid (tactile) fragments of your favorite space: an exquisite molding, the way an arch hits a pilaster. The shadows created

celebrating architecture

through window muntins during autumn. A knob that escaped modern intervention. A beam that defined modern intervention. And wholes: the composition of your personality shown in built mass.



Personally, as a creator of "space," as an architect, I am continually energized from the way my education has taught me to "see." But professionally, the work environment often poses a challenge for female

designers. While the creation of architecture has been around since Eve, it wasn't really until 1893 that Sophie Hayden and other female architects collaborated to create a first: a Women's Building for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. This beaux arts building was and is a monumental reflection of women's love for the art. About the same time, another milestone was reached. The first woman—Louise Blanchard Bethune—became the first female member of the American Institute of Architects. Today, the licensing figures are improving slowly. Thirteen percent of registered architects claim womanhood.

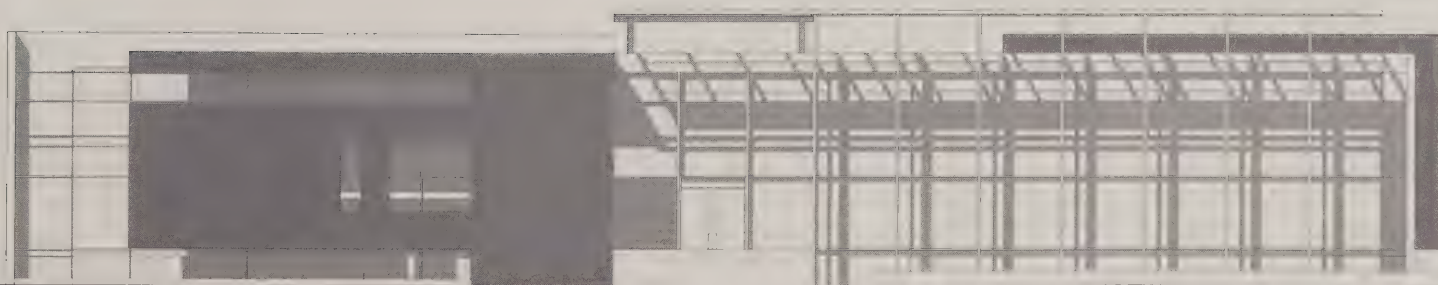
creatively sense them

Some women architects dismiss the idea that gender influences their work, while others have clear feminist agendas. Others feel better attuned than men to spatial issues. It has often been thought that women pay closer attention to architecture's human side: a concern for both social issues and for the needs of the user. I think women, as men, cannot be categorized by "type"; we all sense architecture and good design the



through a woman's experience

by Linda Eastley





same way: from *visiting*, *experiencing*, and *absorbing* design and understanding the chemistry that develops between architectural or natural elements.

touching rough edges

Exploring my struggle to understand my place in architecture, I talked with two dozen of my women design colleagues, documented their comments, and observed how we female designers work. From these musings, I distilled four gender speedbumps at work in the design profession.

a. *who's in power?*

I think who is in power makes a difference. Often those powerful people are men. Design firms that have a lot of women are often women-owned businesses (WBEs), historically becoming precious members of architecture teams because most public projects require WBEs. While one can argue whether this requirement is "good" or "bad," its presence has created an opportunity for women to become major players in many city projects.

People tend to trust people they bond with. In my observation, bonding for men can take the form of golfing, talking about common



interests (sports), or meals. Because men occupy most of the leadership positions in my industry and because most clients that I work with are men, there is a self-perpetuating cycle of those in power extending trust and responsibility to other men. Women continue to be left out of these activities, so they look for alternative ways to earn trust. I believe that women are beginning to make in-roads into this men's world, forming professional groups where networking becomes natural and playing on their strengths as good designers, communicators, and managers to win clients on their own merits.

I also have observed a discomfort that some women feel with hierarchy. For many, getting along well with peers is important. Taking a traditional leadership role is reportedly difficult for women who are "higher up" because it feels unnatural. In my colleagues' shared experience, men are regarded as the sages of the firm: those willing to fly more miles, work longer hours, and, usually, self-congratulate to self-promote (a skill we women would be wise to learn since we have *just* as much to celebrate).

My professional female friends tend to have more interests outside of work (sports, families, teaching), creating less face time in the office. Most women wouldn't trade their interests for a faster climb to high positions but do find that they need more recognition for their outside-of-work activities. These activities sometimes cause their male or female counterparts, who have more singular ambition, to cast a disparaging eye on them. One person in my office said to a co-worker who was opting for a more moderate work schedule, "I can't take you seriously if you only work part-time."

b. what is valued and the mysticism of multi-tasking

From talking with fellow colleagues, the issue of adding value is a big factor. Reflecting on





*Treat yourself to a beautiful pilgrimage to women's spaces. Travel via literature in *The Sex of Architecture*, twenty-four captivating essays written by female designers and educators. Or, read Denise Scott Brown's essay in *Einstein's Wife*.*

If you find yourself with a bit of curiosity in the following beautiful cities, See what you Feel:

Gae Aulenti: Musee d'Orsay, Paris,
France

Rebecca Binder: Ackerman Student Union,
University of California Los Angeles,
Los Angeles, California

Elaine Carbrej: Westwood Village,
Waterwood, Texas

Ann Chaintreuil: buildings at the University
of Washington, Kodiak, Alaska

Andrea Leers and Jane Weinzapfel: some
Boston pilgrimages: District Court in
Newburyport, MIT School of
Architecture and Planning

Maya Yin Lin's Vietnam Veterans
Memorial, Washington, D.C.

Julia Morgan: historic buildings at Mills
College, St. John's Presbyterian
Church, Berkeley California, and
Restoration of the Fairmont Hotel, San
Francisco, California

Lutah Marie Riggs: Vendanta Temple,
Lockwood Cabin

Margot Siegel: academic buildings at
University of California; YWCA,
NCJW, and the United Way buildings

Cathy Simon: Stanley Park Zoo, Rosa
Parks Senior Apartments, Bard
College, Shields Library at UC Davis

my own experience—relatively short at fourteen years—I find that men tend to focus quickly on one type of work, and they practice to become incredibly good at it. Women I talk with resist the cubby-hole and prefer to diversify their skills and interests—to keep things interesting and exciting. I personally like the challenge of working on several projects that have no relation to each other. Bring it on! I may not be the expert for one given type of project, but I am really good at understanding an array of projects well enough to be competent.

This brings on the question of “What is valued?” Most companies need people to be specialists in a particular thing. That way, they can tell future clients, “I’ll send you to the expert.” Many women whom I watch are disrupting this mold—but, perhaps not for the good of a company accustomed to having experts. How can women apply a more diverse skill-set? They often choose to work in smaller firms, where it is highly valued to be able to do a little of everything. Or, they choose a field of work that can have application across a broad array of projects.

c. how we work

Most women that I talked with, whether colleagues or mentors, have less concern for the monumentality of architecture as they do for creating something that works well. I enjoy working on design teams that have a good mix of women and men. I find that women prefer to work more cooperatively and are less concerned about firm hierarchy when seeking opinions. Unconsciously, I am much more comfortable sharing my thoughts with women. This fact bothers me, but the reality is that often male designers have bigger issues with ego than women, and I tire of being challenged about everything I say.

Kathryn Anthony of the University of Illinois at Chicago Urbana-Champaign recently completed a study of female architects. I ran across her findings after my own conversations and noticed that the women she

interviewed talked about cooperative design—both with colleagues and with clients—being something that they tried to perfect. They said they worked this way because they thought it was successful and because it helped distinguish themselves from other designers.

d. what we choose to work on

Many surveys find that female architects are dominant members of housing and environmental project teams. The question I ask is: Is it because we “can” or because we “want to”?

good architect or good female architect

Sometimes, the biggest insult is to be called a good female designer. After all, we are trying to be good architects, not good *female* architects. It can be discouraging to dwell on the negative barriers for women in the field of architecture but uplifting to discover ways that women have surmounted these obstacles, ignored them in sensible ways, or, best of all, confronted them for the better.

There has been an exponential increase in the number of women in architecture and in their professional recognition in the final decades of the twentieth century. Undaunted by the lack of role models and mentors, women have formed their own networks of associations in architecture, beginning in 1918.

I design because I like the way it makes me feel. I love the creativity and expression that is a part of my daily work, and I find a great deal of satisfaction from what I create. I have found that being female in the design industry has had both disadvantages and advantages. I have been discouraged by events that hinder my way of operating, yet I have been fortunate to have my gender also open doors.

Just a wee bit.

Just enough to get a foothold and

run!



Bringing Back the Marshes

The following is the first of a two-part interview with Suzanne Hawes, a long-time supporter of Exponent II (see "Alone," Exponent II, vol. 22, no. 4 [Summer 2000], p. 8). In keeping with the theme of the current issue, this section of the interview focuses on Suzanne's education and career-related years. The interview will be continued in the upcoming summer issue of the paper.

Suzanne, I know that your love of nature led to what you studied in your college years and even what you're doing now. Have you always been interested in outdoor pursuits?

Yea, I guess I've been interested in the outdoors since I was little. I was born in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, up in the north woods, and my family has always camped—from when I was a little baby. Then I lived ten blocks from the ocean in San Francisco. My folks loved to collect firewood from the beach and burn it, and so we'd go to the beach at least once a week. I guess I developed my love of the outdoors from that time. Then, during high school, this love was really nurtured when I joined the student section of the California Academy of Science. We had field trips nearly every week. Then, I learned about protest when the museum tried to fire the two women who were our leaders. We wrote petitions, visited the director, and used the press to try to prevent the firings. We weren't successful, but we learned a lot about how to organize a protest.

Can you tell us about your education?

At Stanford, I majored in biology. I knew I wanted to do outdoor things. I really wanted to study birds, but no one told me that Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley had an unwritten agreement that Stanford would specialize in marine biology and Cal in birds. So, ironically, I had gone to the wrong school! However, I made the best of it and took a lot of botany courses.

In the 50s and 60s, not very many women were likely to "just go" to Stanford—at least I don't remember anybody encouraging me or my friends to apply anywhere else but the local colleges. What kind of encouragement did you get, and how did you land at Stanford?

Well, I went to high school in San Francisco. My father was a high school counselor. He had gotten a scholarship to Stanford when he was a boy. After a year, his mother died in childbirth bearing twins, leaving his two baby sisters and a two-year-old brother. His father was beginning to get very early onset Alzheimer's disease—no one knew what it was then. So my father had to quit school to support the family.

He'd loved his year at Stanford and always talked about my going there. On Sunday afternoons, we'd drive down the peninsula and through the campus and eat at a restaurant nearby. I think my father was planting the seeds in me, hoping I'd fulfill his dream of graduating from Stanford. Unfortunately, I didn't. I graduated, but not from Stanford.

You didn't graduate from Stanford?

I got married at the end of my sophomore year, and my husband and I went back to Providence, Rhode Island, so he could pursue a degree in chemistry at Brown. I determined that I was going to be the self-sacrificing wife while my husband was in school. Like most women at that time, I thought it was more important to put Jim through graduate school than to continue my own education.

So, I went to see the head of the biology department at Brown, explained to him about my two years in biology, and asked if there were any jobs in his department. He asked me why I was quitting school. When I answered, "Because I've got to support my husband,"

he asked, "What kind of grades did you have?" I explained that I had gotten almost straight As, and he said, "Well, you can't quit school. Could your parents pay for you to go to school?" I said, "I think my dad would love to pay for my schooling."

He picked up the phone and called what was then the women's half of Brown, Pembroke, and said, "This young lady will be over there to register in about half an hour." He then marched me down the hall to the botany department, where I got a job, and I marched myself over and registered at Pembroke.

So you got your degree at Pembroke?

I ended up getting a bachelor's degree in botany at Pembroke and then, since Jim took a long, long time getting his Ph.D., I got a master's degree in botany. I went into botany instead of biology because botany was out of doors. The biologists never left the lab.

Then Jim and I decided we wanted children. After I got my master's degree in July, my daughter Cindy was born in August.

What happened after you got your master's degree?

I stayed home with Cindy. She had severe asthma and took a lot of care. She'd always get some relief if we'd go to Newport. At the beach, the air coming over the ocean didn't have a lot of pollen in it. We had a little VW bug, and she'd sleep in the well. (This was before the days of seatbelts.) We drove a lot of miles in that little bug.

Finally, Jim got his degree and amazingly — after taking seven years to get it without being thrown out — he got a prize for having the best dissertation.

Jim got a post-doc at the University of California Santa Barbara, and we started driving across the country. Our car broke down in Lincoln, Nebraska, and a pharmacist picked us up, took us to his house, kept us, and got our car towed in. It took all the money Jim had gotten for his prize in chemistry to fix the car, but we eventually putted our way to Santa Barbara.

Suzanne's stay in Santa Barbara and then in Marshall, Texas, are discussed in Part 2 of this interview.

When we got to New Orleans, where my husband had gotten a job at Dillard, I thought about taking courses at Tulane, but they were very expensive. We didn't have any money, and Dillard didn't teach much graduate biology, so I started going to the University of New Orleans (UNO) and taking whatever graduate courses they had in the two hours the boys were in kindergarten and pre-kindergarten. I ended up taking marsh ecology and studying lakes and rivers, and that changed my career.

After seven years of teaching, Jim decided that he really didn't like it,

and what he wanted to do was open a bicycle repair shop. Our house was a converted barn with a huge garage where he could work.



Digital image by Grieg Olivier

I went to one of the professors at UNO and asked about a job. The department had just gotten a contract with the Army Corps of Engineers, and so he said, "Sure, you can manage the contract for me." We were very pleased; it wasn't much money, but it was enough to keep us going. The day before Christmas, the professor called and said, "Sue, I'm sorry, but the Corps has backed out on the contract, and I don't have a job for you. However, the Corps may need somebody."

I'd never even heard of the Corps of Engineers and didn't have a clue what they did. I talked to them,

and it turns out they did need a biologist. But they weren't sure they wanted to hire a woman.

What year was this?

1972. I explained I had a master's degree. I filled out all the paperwork, and they said they'd hire me as a GS7 [government rating], which didn't make much money.

When a friend who got hired at the same time and I were talking one day, I realized that he was a GS11, not a GS7 like me, and our backgrounds were exactly the same. So I went bouncing into the Personnel Office and asked how can this be, and they said, "Well, you don't have the right kinds of courses, and you don't have any work experience in botany." I said, "What do you mean? I have a year's work at a lab where I studied fungi in frogs and turtles," and they said, "But it says here the study of histoplasma in frogs and turtles; that's zoology not biology."

It took six months before some college professor decided that it really was botany. I was the only person who was promoted from a GS7 to a GS11, and by doing so, I caught up with the guys.

At that point, there were about 800-1000 employees at the Corps. Out of 400 engineers, two were female. I was the third professional woman hired, and it was hard.

How was it difficult?

My boss didn't think women should go out in the field—do work outside. He thought it was too hot for women.

Did his attitude have anything to do with the old Southern way of treating women?

Yes. In the Southern belle tradition, women stayed in the big house with a parasol, sipping mint juleps on the porch. Slaves did the field-work, and white men supervised. No white person should go outside. When slavery was done away with, the men went outside, but not the women.



Digital image by Grieg Olivier

Were you able to change his mind?

One day I convinced him to let me go with him. I walked his legs off, so he finally decided that maybe it was okay for women to be in the field. I never did get very close to him, but I got to be very close to a lot of the fellows, and I learned a lot from them.

I'd had book learning but not practical learning. I just soaked up

the knowledge from these guys. A lot of them were hunters. I teased them about blowing up deer and ducks, but they were good-natured about it. They accepted me as one of them. I knew more plants than they did, so I'd teach them about plants, and they'd teach me about fish and mammals. It worked out very well.

Eventually, my boss retired, and I got his job. I was section chief for

about ten years. In 1990, we got a new district engineer who had a vision of a different kind of job for me. I became "Project Manager for the Environment"—which title he dreamed up, not me. I loved doing the work again rather than being a supervisor, which I dislike because of the paperwork and having to handle people problems. I have done this job for ten years and absolutely love it.

How did you deal with all the problems women have when having a career and raising their families?

Dealing with children and career worked out very well because Jim worked out of the house—out of the garage, really.

His bike repair shop ended up working for a while. But if a little black kid came in to get something fixed with no money, Jim would fix it for free. We ended up having a whole bunch of black teenagers around at one point. They'd hang out and play ping pong, and we'd feed them and just kind of let them know that there were more things a person could do with his life than sell drugs. This was the time that the crack craze was beginning to hit the black community.

Later, Jim wrote computer programs. He sold a couple of them, but mostly he was just home with the kids while I supported the family. And it worked.

I'd get the kids ready for school and did most of the cooking because Jim made two things—lasagna and chili. We had each of those about once a month, and I did the rest. Jim was there when the kids came home from school.

A lot of us don't know what a biologist actually does, so why don't you tell us a little bit about your work.

The first thing I did when I started working for the Corps was to help write environmental impact statements. If the Corps was doing an engineering project, they would have to know how it would impact plant and animal life. So we'd

survey the plants and animals. No one had really studied the marshes or the swamps holistically.

My job now is to build a bridge to the environmental community—groups like the Sierra Club and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana—and to the other natural resource agencies, such as Fish and Wildlife Service. I've loved this part of my job because I work with such good people.

In 1990, Congress passed the Breaux Act, which allocated money to help restore coastal Louisiana. The Louisiana coast is losing twenty-five square miles of marsh every year, some due to erosion but, in the eastern part of the state, mostly because we leveed the Mississippi River to keep it from overflowing so people could live in southeastern Louisiana.

The Breaux Act also mandated that six federal agencies in the state work together. These agencies had always mistrusted each other and had had different agendas. In the 70s, the Natural Resource Conservation Service started helping people manage their marshes. It's the job of the Corps of Engineers to build levees and bridges—so we destroy marsh. The Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the EPA, and the State Department of Natural Resources were interested in resources. It was at first kind of like six strange dogs circling around each other with their fur up and growling.

Eventually, we realized that we all cared about the marshes and that we wanted to save the state. Each

group might have thought it had to do it a different way, but everybody had a common goal.

We slowly started building what is now an extremely strong coalition of people working together. We call it our dysfunctional family. We still have tremendous arguments, but together we come up with different ways to restore the marshes—by building them with dredge material, by putting in rock to prevent erosion, by figuring out ways to turn the river loose to build the marsh like it used to be.

Now what I do is evaluate the marshes in summer field trips. I like to go on those. I recently read Terry Tempest Williams, and she points out how important it is to go out of doors. I knew this, but then she had a paragraph saying, "To protect what we love outside, we are inside—inside our offices, inside boardrooms, inside universities, inside hearings. . . . We are inside scheming, talking, telephoning, writing, granting, faxing memos, memos to them, memos to us; inside to protect what we love outside. The heart of good biology is a central core of imagination. It is the basis for responsible science, and it has everything to do with intimacy—spending time outside."

The same team has been doing this wetland value assessment for ten years now, and we do get out of doors. The marshes are lovely. I think all of us have had magical moments in the marshes that draw us together and give us a sense of purpose and dedication. And then we can go inside and write the reports and send those e-mails to help save them. 🌿

Art from Ancestry

by Amy Powell

Valerie Atkisson is a tall, lithe strawberry blonde with long, beautiful fingers. Good artist hands, she says. She folds her legs underneath her body as effortlessly as a cat as she talks about her first forays into incorporating her family history into art.

"My family always told family stories, and when we would go on vacation, inevitably we'd end up at some ancestor's old home or a place where great-great-grandfather came from or something like that. As I moved to New York, I began thinking a lot about where I came from and where my roots were, and I realized that I didn't have a specific landscape that I could identify with as my home. My family moved around a lot growing up, and I began to think about landscape in those terms—as an identity. I began to realize that my ancestors would be my roots, that I could say 'this is who I am.'"

I met Valerie soon after I moved to New York City in 1998, and the first time I saw one of her paintings, I was stunned. It was a large canvas, an abstract in shades of ochre and green and brown, the design a pattern of multiplying tentacles, reaching downward like the roots of a tree. It was beautiful, a painting I wanted to live with. So a few months later, when Val gave a class on "Exploring your Family History through the Arts" as part of the New York, New York Stake Family History Seminar, I made a point of attending. Her slide show

was revelatory—paintings of seven generations of female ancestry, faces in shades of blue; a landscape of prairie sunflowers, wheat, and an enormous cloudless sky, symbols of her ancestor's pioneer pilgrimage; abstracts filled with root and tree themes; a white room with her complete genealogical history written on its walls. I had been given a glimpse of the rich artistic possibilities inherent in the myths and stories of our forefathers and mothers.

An artistic child, Valerie grew up and received her Bachelor's in Fine Art from Brigham Young University and then moved to New York City to pursue a Master's degree at the School of Visual Arts. She graduated in 1998 and has been a working artist ever since. It was while she was attending the School of Visual Arts that Valerie began to explore new artistic ideas.

"I became interested in work that addressed the space around it; you could call it installation work," she says. "Dealing not with the rectangle or the canvas but using the environment around the art. I was very encouraged to experiment and to not put limitations on my ideas. Graduate school was a big time of growth for me because I tried to experiment as much as I could and not have this focus on style or medium."

During graduate school, Valerie started exploring root systems metaphorically in her abstract

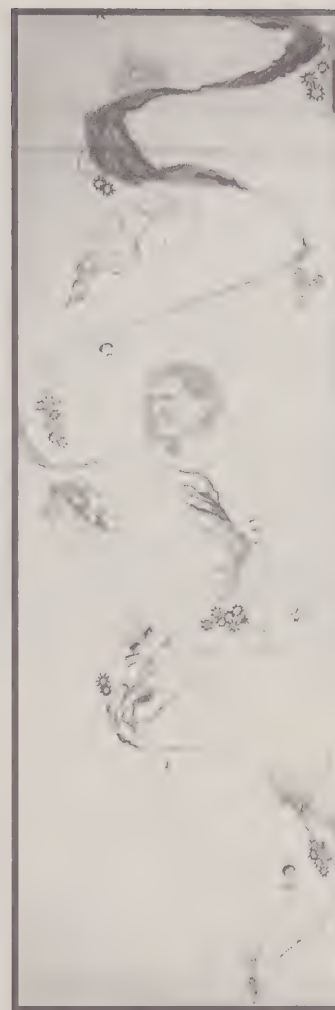
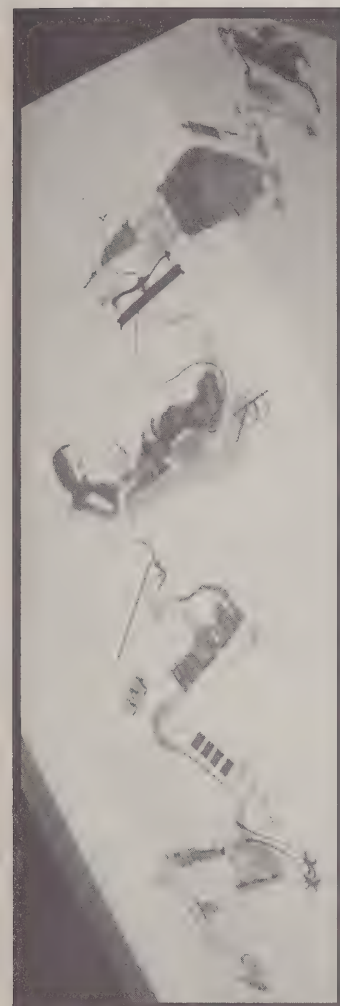
paintings. She became more and more fascinated with her family history as she read several biographies of her ancestors, and then she started to do more serious genealogical research.

"The summer after my first year of grad school, I decided I wanted to see all of the vital (genealogical) information written on the wall of my studio. I was interested in the shape that the information would take—both the known information and the information that was not there—and somehow that shape would become for me something of a self-portrait."

She went to the Family History Center and started downloading and printing out information from the Ancestral File. What was meant to be a weekend project turned into a summer project as Valerie carefully copied out thousands of names and dates—beginning with herself and stretching back to the year 6 A.D.—onto the white walls, and even the ceiling and floor, of her studio. A year later, Valerie would recreate this project at Artists' Space, a gallery in Soho.

"I realized I really liked that project. I decided I wanted to start putting some images with these names because that's where I felt like the power was in this information—in the details."

continued on p. 29



Top left: *Patriarchal Line*, 1999
acrylic, colored pencil on wall
13 1/2 x 10 feet

Top middle: *Hanging Family History*, 2000
paper, copper wire, rice paste
14 x 4 1/2 feet

Top right: *Matriarchal Line*, 1999
acrylic, graphite, pastel on wall
14 x 4 1/2 feet

Right: *Hanging Family History* (detail)





Top: *Family in Norway*. 2000
acrylic, marker on wall, 30 x 80 feet
Queens Museum of Art

Left and middle: Details from *Family in Norway*

Right: Artist Valerie Atkisson at work

Using photographs of her ancestors, along with her own “visual memory” of the places her ancestors had lived, Valerie began painting—first on paper then later directly on walls—the stories of her grandmothers and great-grandfathers, their mothers and their children. She traced both her mother’s and her father’s family lines—in “Matriarchal Line” and “Patriarchal Line,” respectively—and created a three-dimensional sculpture that she calls “a map, so to speak, of my family history.” Along the same lines as the “self-portrait” of genealogical information written on her studio walls, the sculpture is composed of paper triangles, supported by a framework of copper wire. Each triangle is an ancestor, linked together at the corners, parents connected to children, linked to their children and to their children’s children. Valerie’s name is on the triangle at the very top, and she holds her entire known genealogy below her, over 5,000 names.

“The overwhelming feeling that I wanted the viewer to have is that all of this known information is out there and that each person is made up of all these other people, whether they are known or not.”

Valerie’s work has been shown at d.u.m.b.o Arts Center, the Bronx Museum of Art, and most recently at the Queen’s Museum of Art. The first thing I noticed as I approached the flat, glass front of the Queen’s Museum of Art was a huge, wedge-shaped wall mural, featuring a larger-than-life portrait of a woman obviously from a past era, painted in shades of blue. Valerie Atkisson’s “Family in

Norway” begins at the small point of the wedge with a portrait of Ragna Johnson, Valerie’s great-grandmother and most recent relative actually born in Norway. The portrait expands backward in time across the width of the triangular space, ending with a dramatic black and white landscape of Norway’s rugged northern mountains. Ragna Johnson’s father, Peter Johnson, appears holding young Ragna on his knee, along with three boots—tall, medium, and short. Peter’s father, Olaus Johnson, was a shoemaker whose boots were made so well that it was said he made “three-generation boots”—boots that started off knee-high and were cut down over the years as the leather slowly wore out.

Olaus and his family lived on a small island within the Trondheim Fjord called Ytterøya, where they met the Mormon missionaries and were baptized in the fjord. After the family joined the Church, the town sheriff and landlord asked them to leave the small island, so they took their house down, board by board, and sailed it to the city of Trondheim, where they built it up again. The house still stands today and is included in the mural.

Most of the research for “Family in Norway” was done last July, when Valerie spent two months in Norway, visiting the towns where her ancestors had lived and worked and worshipped, taking photos, and doing the paintings and drawings that would later serve as studies for this dramatic piece. A grant from the Rema Hart Mann Foundation helped finance her travels.

I wondered if Valerie felt any sense of loss, knowing that, after a couple of months, her mural would be painted over as the space was made ready for the next artist. She says its ephemeral nature is actually a part of her work.

“It’s a temporary piece, and it’s about a family tree. Some of that information is true, some of it maybe is false, some of it could be there just temporarily. I think there is a real effect of permanence when it’s on the wall—because if it is on paper or canvas, it’s like there is a buffer zone; it’s not as immediate or as powerful. In painting on the wall, I have to sacrifice the work itself. Which I think says something about our lives. We’re here and we know we’ll live forever, but not in color. Not like we are now.” ■



Detail from *Matriarchal Line*

Punch Card Pride: In Praise

by Linda Hoffman Kimball

At the most recent Midwest Pilgrims' gathering, the women around my lunch table began to talk about their youthful summer jobs. It turns out that we bright, thoughtful gals all had humble starts.

One woman worked as a catalog phone order person. She had stealthily tracked down a batch of missing orders on the computer and earned a promotion by her smart detective work.

Another woman grew up on a ranch in the 1950s and, while her brothers were out roping and castrating livestock—or whatever fun stuff the guys got to do—she took care of paperwork in the office. The highlight appeared to be getting to name the calves. I was disappointed to hear that she didn't get to select the names—say Buttercup or Daisy—but calculated them according to the specifications of their pedigrees.

One woman helped her father in the Water Department office in her small Arizona town. Another changed linens and washed towels for a family-run motel. Some did factory work. One summer, I washed dishes in a diner—the kind referred to accurately as a “greasy

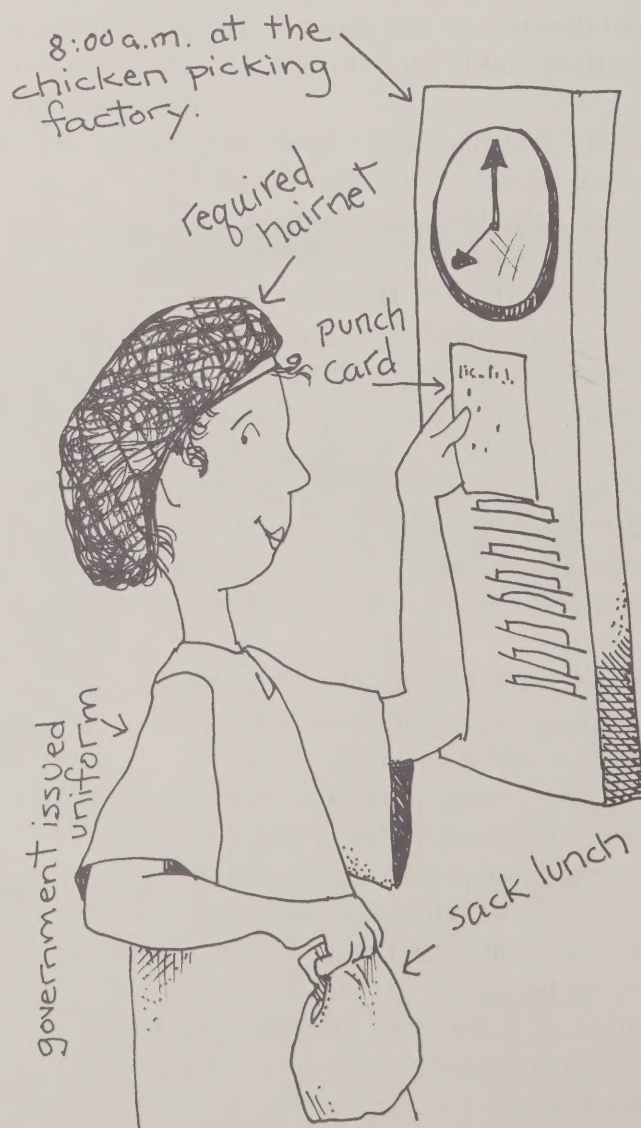
spoon.” The next year I picked cooked meat off chicken bones in a meat-packing factory during the summer. Neal Armstrong walked on the moon and Woodstock attracted my peers.

Many of us at the table returned from the Pilgrimage to help our teenagers search for their own summer employment. Would we wish our childhood dishpan hands, our forty hours per week of

tedium, our mind-numbing teenage drudgery on the next generation? My answer is yes, I would. In fact, just this afternoon, my son sent off a resume for a job on the grounds crew of the university in town.

That very deed reflects the fact that some things have changed since my era of dish washing and chicken picking. Since when would an eighteen-year-old have to send in a resume for such employment? Since when would an eighteen-year-old have to even craft a resume at all? Apparently, sometime in the intervening years between my youth and his.

This requirement is one of the good byproducts of my son's hunt for summer work. He now knows what a resume looks like. He can see in print his own accomplishments. He has taken time to assess and select events in his young life that may boost him onward. For example, who knew that playing on the rugby team might make him look like the kind of strapping youth the grounds crew is looking for? And there's the teaching moment. As much as he might like to include the red badge of courage details of his bloody eye, the new gash on his cheek, and the cleat mark scar on the back of his ear, he has learned that resumes are supposed to be short and to the point.



of Humble Summer Jobs

My son was employed last summer as well. For that job, he didn't have to submit a resume. He landed it the same way as many of my Pilgrim friends landed theirs: through nepotism. This time-honored way of landing a job is a good thing—on this level, anyway. There is something primal and ancient about this familial route to earning income—even if it is learning to fold hospital corners at Aunt Edith's Motel 6. It is a modern parallel to tribal elders' passing on their gnostic mysteries.

Despite the benevolence of the relative who smoothed the way for that first job, my son moaned about the tedium. He confessed that he figured out a way to prop his book up at this desk job to make it look like he was reading when, in fact, he was snoozing. He shrieked when he saw how much the government took out of his paycheck. But, as a plus, he figured out how to use the public transportation system in town.

A summer job is a fertile petri dish for developing compassion, a touch of the common man and woman, an appreciation for the life of America's working masses. I believe these are all good things. My son's philosophical assessment after that first summer job was this: "The best part is knowing that this is the worst job I will ever have in my life." That may or may not be the case. He hasn't yet started clipping hedges in sweltering heat with mosquitoes the size of Detroit buzzing around him. And I don't believe my picking chicken meat was a step up from washing dishes. (Wait a minute! Wasn't it just last night around supper time I was both picking the meat off chicken bones and washing dishes!?) But his remark evidences another plus of humble beginnings. It can be a great motivator.

I have other friends whose summer jobs were more upscale. Some were counselors in exotic

camps for the rich and foreign. Their adventures sound eye-opening, too. "Ricardo wore white everywhere. He thought he would be playing polo all the time." "Boris's family kept sending him packages from somewhere in Eastern Europe. They always included a kind of cracker they made and were using his US camp address for their import/export business."

Life lessons are available everywhere. My friends remind me that ticks and poison ivy are no respecter of persons and have brought even the mightiest little camper snob to a sense of perspective.

A sense of perspective. That's what I wish for my children as they make their first forays into the world of the employed. And nothing quite teaches that like being a working stiff. ■

Sisters Speak

As mentioned in the last (Winter) issue of *Exponent II*, the Sisters Speak question for our Summer issue is "How do you maintain family harmony when a teenaged or adult child decides to no longer go to church or makes other

choices not in harmony with your family values?"

Although our original deadline for receiving your replies was July 1, we would like to extend that date to July 30. We know that many of

you will not have had your copy of this issue for very long, so we hope you will think quickly about your experiences and respond to this question so that you can be of help to other sisters who are dealing with this issue in their lives.

Exponent Retreat

We are pleased to announce that the keynote speaker for this year's Retreat will be Laurel M. Madsen. A writer, editor, and teacher, Laurel has travelled extensively and lived in several different countries. She was a language consultant at the Japanese Embassy and editor of the UN monthly newsletter while living in Bangladesh. (see "The Women's Song," Laurel's Helen Candland Stark essay contest-winning article on Bangladesh in *Exponent II*, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 3)

With the closing of Hillsboro Camp in New Hampshire, we have had to make some changes in our Retreat for this year. Here are the particulars:

- The retreat will be held from Friday evening, September 21, through Sunday afternoon, September 23, 2001.
- The new location is Camp Bournedale in Plymouth, Mass. Located near beautiful Cape Cod, this camp provides some of the modern conveniences our beloved Hillsboro could not—flush toilets and showers in the cabins!
- The cost will be \$140.00 per person.

Exponent II on the Web

We have begun putting twenty-five years of *Exponent II* on our Web site. All the essays, poetry, interviews, and fiction printed in the paper editions will be online for everyone to access, along with a master index and a concise summary of each entry for quick and easy reference. You will be able to find, for instance, everything written by your favorite author or everything about cancer or whatever else you want to read about.

Some of the most recent issues are already up, and the number of available issues will keep growing. A new host is providing us with the space and speed for quicker access.

We need volunteers to get this project moving along. Many of the tasks, such as scanning, typing, or proofing articles, can be done at home and emailed to us. You can choose your favorite issue and articles to work on.

We also need financial assistance for this project, and we feel confident that *Exponent II* supporters will happily contribute when they begin to enjoy the benefits of the site. Send your friends to the site, and send your tax-deductible contribution to Exponent II, P.O. Box 128, Arlington, MA 02476.

Check out our Web site for details about how to help with this project at www.exponent2.org

- Call, write, or e-mail our Retreat coordinators for a registration form, directions to the camp, a list of what to bring, and any questions you might have:

Emily Clyde-Curtis (617) 489-7430, eclyde-curtis@hds.harvard.edu and Barbara Taylor (508) 478-4469, Btaylor@adlex.com

- Or download the registration form and get updated information about the Retreat on the Retreat page on our Web site at www.exponent2.org

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